

CHANGES TO THE TEXT IN ROMAN FEVER

The earliest complete draft of the opera spread the material of the Wharton story more evenly over the various scenes with the mothers. The breakdown was as follows:

1. Alida, Grace. Much as in the final version, though Alida begins to needle Grace about her night at the Coliseum before the girls enter.
2. Alida, Grace, Barbara, Jenny. Much more diffuse than the final version, with a longer description of the meeting with the officers, a long conversation about how the mothers originally met, first mention of the Roman Fever legend (told as a party piece by Grace), entwined discussions (each mother and daughter as a separate pair) of the girl's upcoming date to watch some parade involving the men, and the Quartet.
3. Alida, Grace. Further probing about that night long ago, mixed in with their views of each other in New York.
4. Alida. The Bells aria, longer than the final version, but essentially the same. Grace does not leave, however, though the lights go off her as she sits quietly knitting.
5. Alida, Grace. Very much as in the closing scene of the final version, right up to the moment when Alida confesses to having forged Delphin's letter because she was jealous of Grace and hated her.
6. Alida, Grace, Barbara, Jenny. The girls return, excited from the parade, and bearing the invitation to go out flying that night. Alida fails to enlist Jenny in her matchmaking and snaps her string of pearls. General confusion. The girls leave.
7. Alida, Grace. The rest of the material from Wharton, now very short. Grace turns the tables with her revelation.

The changes to the final version involved a good deal of compression, cutting out the girls' visit to the parade, separating off the brief matchmaking scene between Alida and Jenny—but also (for better or worse) postponing almost the entire content of the actual Wharton story to the final scene. It also became clear that RW wanted to structure the whole piece around three numbers in a more popular style: the duet of the girls, the Roman Fever aria, and the quartet (now postponed until just before the girls' final exit). For all three elements, RW very much set the tone, and in two of the cases wrote most of the words.

GIRLS' DUET

[RB's words for new concept, with dance and scat added by RW]

They bowed to us; they kissed our hands
(very classy, don't you think?).
Very spiffy too, got up to kill,
all decked out in white and gold.

They go flying every day,
getting the hang of the new machines.
Oh, the Age of Flight is all the rage,
it's gotten into their blood!

And when they spoke of the
wonderful feeling of flying
high up in the endless sky,
the thrill and the excitement
were mirrored in their eyes!

ROMAN FEVER LEGEND

[RB's original was for Mrs. Ansley]

Great-aunt Harriet, while a girl of nineteen,
spent the winter in Rome with her younger sister, Phoebe.
Harriet collected flowers, and pressed them in an album,
as ladies of that era used to do.

She formed a desire to acquire a certain Moonflower,
whose respendednt purple blossoms opened only at night.
She sent her little sister to the Forum to collect her one,
alone among the ruins, after dark.

Phoebe slipped away, stayed too late, and caught a fever.
Aunt Harriet was stricken with remorse.
For six long nights, she kept vigil by her bedside,
but all in vain—her little sister died.

The truth came out a very long time afterwards:
Aunt Harriet confessed she'd sent her out of jealousy.
It appears there was a man, and both sisters were in love with him,
but only Harriet knew of the fever in the air....

[RW gives this to the Waiter, his only singing]

Febbre Perniciosa, si.
Two sisters, old one, how you say,
like queen, but *non si bella*.
But little sister, *dolce e molto bella*.
But very sad, both sisters live same man.
Older sister very jealous,
so she think up evil plan.
Ask little sister to go to the Forum
after dark when very cold.
"For album need special flowers," she says,
"so our album be like other fine ladies."
Little sister go get flower,
but in the cold night air,
she catch *febbre perniciosa*, and die.
Many years later,
old sister when she lay dying,
confess her wicked plot, and die.

QUARTET

[RB placed this earlier in the opera; two verses sung by all four characters,
with small alterations, such as "her" for "us" in the mothers' lines]

THE GIRLS:

The days pass all too quickly...
Let us enjoy our opportunities:
Rome, the parade, the young men—
And tomorrow... who knows?
The years will pass by quickly,
leaving us the memories
of opportunities enjoyed and tasted,
of pleasure, without regret...

THE MOTHERS (*text variant for verse 2*):

The years have passed so quickly,
and we have only memories
of opportunities enjoyed or wasted,
of pleasure—or regret...

[A note in RB's draft says: "Change greatly for the girls, but keep serious, in their own terms." That intermediate stage has been lost, but in the final version the text for the girls was written by RW, in a rather different style; that for the mothers uses some of the intermediate RB text.]

BARBARA ANSLEY:

High in the sky will I find my dream,
there in a star or a bright moonbeam?
Whatever my fate, I can but hope and wait,
for there in the stars my fate may be.
What will he say as we wine and dine?
Will he quietly give me a sign?
And what will I say if while we dance,
he holds me close and hints at romance?
I simply don't know, but it's my guess:
in Rome, I'll just do as the Romans do.

JENNY SLADE:

High in the sky she'll find her dream,
there in a star or a bright moonbeam.
For her this could be a night sublime,
like part of a grand celestial design.
And if he whispers of love perchance,
she won't faint or fall into a trance.
It's clear what she'll say and what she'll do:
in Rome, she'll just do as the Romans do.

GRACE ANSLEY:

Another springtime, another girl in love.
Will she be happy, or have regrets?
Whatever her fate, I can but watch and wait,
as in joy she awakens and blossoms,
and through her relive that other spring
that here in Rome I knew.

ALIDA SLADE:

Another springtime long ago,
another girl in love,
I waited on the edge of bliss,
eager, radiant, filled with hope.
But now only painful echoes remain
of the hopes that here in Rome I knew.